

Education, Learning and Skills

Where we are now

There is extensive evidence showing the advantages of good early years and primary education to later success in school and in developing social skills and appropriate behaviour. For example, quality nursery provision, support to parents and helping children learn to read during the primary school years are all crucial. Pupils entering secondary school without basic literacy skills struggle to access the curriculum and are at risk of falling further behind their peers.

Educational attainment in East Sussex has improved since 2002 but has, on average, been below national and regional levels at Key Stage 2, GCSE and A' Level. There are more variations in performance across the county: of the five boroughs and districts, the performance of Hastings is significantly lower, particularly in the secondary phase. Of the 354 districts nationally, Hastings (which is 29th most deprived district nationally) performance at Key Stage 4 is third worst. There are also significant variations of performance in Eastbourne. In some subject areas improvements have exceeded national averages, for example Science and Mathematics at Key Stage 3. In others, such as percentage of A*-C English and Mathematics we have not kept pace. However, the attainment gap between some groups of pupils and pupils as a whole remains too wide and work needs to focus on these pupils and areas to narrow the gap.

Access to learning outside formal education is an issue because of the rural nature of the county and lack of provision in some areas. Organisations have worked together to overcome these barriers for example by offering new learning opportunities in community settings, such as libraries and village halls. Sussex Downs College and new educational and vocational centres such as the University Centre Hastings, Wealden Skills Centre at Uckfield and Prospects House in Hailsham are delivering a range of further education, adult education and vocational courses to people who previously had to travel out of the county in some cases to access similar facilities. The East Sussex Economic Study 2007 highlights low skills levels in Hastings and Eastbourne. About 10% of the population have no qualifications, worse than the whole of the South East. A skilled and adaptable workforce is essential for local business to be profitable, competitive and sustainable. Inadequate opportunities, ambition and skills levels can also affect individual and

community wellbeing by perpetuating cycles of low aspiration, low attainment, unemployment and poverty already evident in some deprived communities and the high levels of young people not in education, employment or training. Opportunities to continue learning in later life, for example through the University of the Third Age, enable older people to be active, engage with and mentor young people and maintain their independence.

The Challenges Ahead

We have achieved a great deal: increasing educational attainment, learning opportunities and skills development across East Sussex, improving access and developing new facilities such the new multi-million pound higher education and college centres in Hastings. A good education and relevant skills can improve people's life chances and quality of life. An educated and skilled workforce also contributes significantly to regenerating communities and improving our economy. We therefore need to do more to raise people's aspirations and achievements, and to narrow the gap between the highest and lowest achievers and between our most and least deprived communities.

Our strategic priority for 2026 is to provide high quality education, learning and skills development opportunities for all by building on good performance and improving poor performance

Our key tasks will be to:

- Establish integrated services for children under 5 and their families through a network of children's centres and increase take up and quality of early years education
- Provide and increase accessible vocational and academic, lifelong learning and skills development opportunities for all, including people with special educational needs and people in later life
- Develop early years support for children, their parents and carers
- Raise educational achievement and skills levels across the county
- Reduce the educational attainment and skills gap for people from deprived and vulnerable backgrounds and disadvantaged areas
- Develop adult learning provision and take-up across the county
- Increase employer involvement and satisfaction with skills training
- Enable all young people to be in education, employment or training.